History of the Apostolic Christian Church

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The origins of the Apostolic Christian Church all trace back to Samuel Heinrich Froelich (1803-1857). Samuel was born to religious parents who were descendants of the French Huguenots (a Calvinistic Protestant movement in France), living in Brugg, Switzerland. They named their son Samuel and dedicated their infant to the ministry in a church ceremony in the local Swiss Reformed Church, where his father was employed as a Sexton. It would seem that this set the course for his life to come, though probably not as his parents would have imagined.

When Samuel reached age 17, he went off to the University of Zurich to begin training as a pastor in the state church. After finishing his studies at Zurich, Samuel transferred to the then-new University of Basel for the remainder of his theological training.

In that era, Switzerland had an official government church. During his theological studies, he developed a different viewpoint than the official government church doctrine. When Froehlich completed his studies, he found it very difficult to get a job in the state church because his approach did not follow the government church guidelines. In 1830, he was appointed as the vicar of an ailing, poorly attended church in Leutwil. Undeterred by his appointment, he proceeded to preach using his viewpoint. Very quickly, the church was filled to overflowing with nearly 2,000 people, many from neighboring parishes. A great awakening had begun in the once nearly-dead church.

Then in 1830, the state church introduced a new catechism (formal religious instruction for children and adults). The new catechism conflicted with what Froehlich had been taught while in seminary. He refused to use the new catechism. Froehlich had already angered many of his peers because of his unconventional preaching methods. His great success also angered his peers. Many people abandoned their home churches to attend Froehlich's church. Consequently, his peers eagerly took advantage of this opportunity and notified his superiors of his refusal to use the new catechism. As a result, Froehlich was dismissed from his post and banned from ever preaching in a state church again.

Undaunted by being kicked out of the official Swiss church, he became a missionary and preached using his own approach. Although he successfully attracted a large number of followers, he was also kicked out of several successive towns. Froelich named his church the Evangelical Baptist Church.

In 1847, the sizeable Amish congregation in Lewis County, New York, had a religious crisis. One man in the congregation stated that he knew a man who was knowledgeable about the issues that were dividing them and thought he might be able to end their confusion. He said the man was Samuel Froehlich of Switzerland. This man had earlier been baptized into Froehlich's fledgling church in Switzerland, but for some reason, he

ended up in an Amish congregation that later emigrated to America from the Alsace-Lorraine area of Europe. The ministers agreed to ask Froehlich or one of his representatives to visit their church.

Upon receipt of their letter, Samuel Froehlich decided not to visit America himself. Instead, his new church immediately ordained Benedict Weyeneth for this mission and sent him to America. Benedict Weyeneth was born in 1819 in Switzerland. He was a believer in Samuel Froehlilch's church methodologies.

After arriving in New York, Weyeneth attended church services with the confused congregation. After church services, Weyeneth talked privately with many of the church members about Froehlich's teachings. Very quickly, 75% of the congregation left the Amish congregation and converted to the new Evangelical Baptist faith. A total of five ministers, including at least one bishop, also joined the new church.

1847, Weyeneth returned to Europe for a while. On November 20, 1850, he married Elizabeth Blunier, daughter of Casper and Elizabeth Schoental Blunier of Trub, Bern, Switzerland. He and his bride returned to settle in America in 1851. They successively lived in New York, Ohio, Iowa, and Peoria. In 1857, Weyeneth finally decided to settle in rural Roanoke, Illinois, permanently.

Very quickly, new churches developed in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and other states. In 1984, Perry A. Klopfenstein published his book titled March to Zion. In his book, Klopfenstein details when and how each new church developed in the United States.

Benjamin Nussbaum wrote two pamphlets about the history of the Apostolic Church. In 1973 he wrote his South Side history, and in 1975 he wrote his North Side History. Nussbaum recounted the North Side church began with Joseph Virkler. He was both an Elder and Minister. In 1864, he and his family moved from New York to a farm north of Forrest, Illinois.

As more families arrived in the area, Virkler started conducting church services in local homes. Around 1870, a small two-room church was built on Virkler's land. The family names of some of the first members were Abersol, Honegger, Huber, Keller, Leuthold, Metz, Ramseyer, Scharlach, Stoller, and Schwartzentraub.

As more families settled in the Fairbury area, attending the church north of Forrest using horse-drawn wagons or buggies became a challenging trip. When there were enough Fairbury members, they built their own South Side church building in 1875. Some of the family names of those early members included Bittner, Farney, Gerber, Hari, Hartman, Hosterwitz, Nussbaum, Roth, Slagle, Sohn, Sommer, Steffen, Wenger, Yoder, Ziegenhorn, and Zimmerman.

Benedict Weyeneth died in Roanoke in 1887. He has descendants throughout the Central Illinois area. In 1917, the national church organization was officially named the Apostolic Christian Churches of America. The first North and South Side Fairbury

churches expanded over time and constructed more significant church buildings. Additional information about how our area churches further evolved can be found in Ben Nussbaum's North and South Side church pamphlets. The Fairbury area Apostolic Christian church members have been a vital part of the success of the Fairbury community.

Samuel Froehlich (1803-1857), Swiss founder of the Apostolic Church